Pete Hegseth’s Secret History | The New Yorker

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Jane Mayer December 2, 2024

After the recent revelation that Pete Hegseth had secretly paid a financial settlement to a woman who had accused him of raping her in 2017, President-elect Donald Trump stood by his choice of Hegseth to become the next Secretary of Defense. Trump’s communications director, Steven Cheung, issued a statement noting that Hegseth, who has denied wrongdoing, has not been charged with any crime. “President Trump is nominating high-caliber and extremely qualified candidates to serve in his administration,” Cheung maintained.

But Hegseth’s record before becoming a full-time Fox News TV host, in 2017, raises additional questions about his suitability to run the world’s largest and most lethal military force. A trail of documents, corroborated by the accounts of former colleagues, indicates that Hegseth was forced to step down by both of the two nonprofit advocacy groups that he ran—Veterans for Freedom and Concerned Veterans for America—in the face of serious allegations of financial mismanagement, sexual impropriety, and personal misconduct.

A previously undisclosed whistle-blower report on Hegseth’s tenure as the president of Concerned Veterans for America, from 2013 until 2016, describes him as being repeatedly intoxicated while acting in his official capacity—to the point of needing to be carried out of the organization’s events. The detailed seven-page report—which was compiled by multiple former C.V.A. employees and sent to the

organization's senior management in February, 2015—states that, at one point, Hegseth had to be restrained while drunk from joining the dancers on the stage of a Louisiana strip club, where he had brought his team. The report also says that Hegseth, who was married at the time, and other members of his management team sexually pursued the organization's female staffers, whom they divided into two groups—the "party girls" and the "not party girls." In addition, the report asserts that, under Hegseth's leadership, the organization became a hostile workplace that ignored serious accusations of impropriety, including an allegation made by a female employee that another employee on Hegseth's staff had attempted to sexually assault her at the Louisiana strip club. In a separate letter of complaint, which was sent to the organization in late 2015, a different former employee described Hegseth being at a bar in the early-morning hours of May 29, 2015, while on an official tour through Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, drunkenly chanting "Kill All Muslims! Kill All Muslims!"

In response to questions from this magazine, Tim Parlatore, a lawyer for Hegseth, replied with the following statement, which he said came from "an advisor" to Hegseth: "We're not going to comment on outlandish claims laundered through *The New Yorker* by a petty and jealous disgruntled former associate of Mr. Hegseth's. Get back to us when you try your first attempt at actual journalism."

Senator Richard Blumenthal, a Democrat from Connecticut and a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, described the report of Hegseth's drinking as alarming and disqualifying. In a phone interview, Blumenthal, who currently leads the Senate committee that will review Hegseth's nomination, told me, "Much as we might be sympathetic to people with continuing alcohol problems, they shouldn't be at the top of our national-security structure." Blumenthal went on, "It's dangerous. The Secretary of Defense is involved in every issue of national security. He's involved in the use of nuclear weapons. He's the one who approves sending troops into combat. He approves drone strikes that may involve civilian casualties. Literally life-and-death issues are in the hands of the Secretary of Defense, and entrusting these kinds of issues to someone who might be incapacitated for any reason is a risk we cannot take."

Blumenthal noted that an earlier nominee for Secretary of Defense, Senator John Tower, a Republican from Texas, was voted down by his Senate colleagues in 1989 because of concerns about his drinking and womanizing. It was the first time that the Cabinet pick of a newly elected President, in this case George H. W. Bush, was rejected by the Senate. "John Tower went down for these same kinds of issues," Blumenthal said. "I don't think it's a partisan issue."

In January, 2016, Hegseth resigned from Concerned Veterans for America, under pressure. An account in the *Military Times* said that Hegseth had "quietly resigned," in a decision that was "mutual" with the organization, amid "rumors of a rift between the former C.E.O. and the group's financial backers." Hegseth, who had no other job lined up at the time, gave no explanation for his departure, other than saying, "Sometimes it just makes sense to make a transition." C.V.A., for its part, released a statement saying that it thanked Hegseth "for his many contributions" and wished him well. But, according to three knowledgeable sources, one of whom contributed to the whistle-blower report, Hegseth was forced to step down from the organization in part because of concerns about his mismanagement and abuse of alcohol on the job.

"Congratulations on Removing Pete Hegseth" is the subject line of an e-mail, obtained by *The New Yorker*, that was sent to Hegseth's successor as president of the group, Jae Pak, on January 15, 2016. The e-mail, sent under a pseudonym by one of the whistle-blowers, included a copy of the report, and went on to say, "Among the staff, the disgust for Pete was pretty high. Most veterans do not think he represents them nor their high standard of excellence." The e-mail also stated that Hegseth had "a history of alcohol abuse" and had "treated the organization funds like they were a personal expense account—for partying, drinking, and using CVA events as little more than opportunities to 'hook up' with women on the road."

Pak, who had served as C.V.A.'s chief operating officer before taking over its presidency, and who no longer works there, declined to comment. A spokesman at Americans for Prosperity, the umbrella political group run by the far-right billionaire Koch family—under whose auspices Concerned Veterans for America was launched, in 2011—confirmed that Hegseth had resigned but declined to comment further on personnel matters. Breitbart News, a publication that acts as a publicist for Trump, attempted to discredit this article before it was published by claiming that it would be citing a "screed" about Hegseth written by a "jealous former coworker" who had been "fired." In fact, the report disclosed in this article is not the same document, although there are some overlaps. (Nearly a dozen employees were laid off by C.V.A. during the time Hegseth worked there, and the proliferation of critical memos and letters to the group's management speaks to the high level of discontent within the organization.)

The whistle-blower report makes extensive allegations. It describes several top managers being involved in drunken episodes, including an altercation at a casino and a hotel Christmas party at which food was thrown from the balcony. Hegseth,

it says, was "seen drunk at multiple CVA events" between 2013 and 2015, a time when the organization was engaged in an ambitious nationwide effort to mobilize veterans to vote for conservative candidates and causes. The project gave Hegseth and his team the opportunity to travel far from the organization's headquarters, in northern Virginia. Hegseth and his team gave speeches, assisted conservative campaigns, and collected voter data valuable for the Kochs' political operation. As a decorated veteran who by 2014 had become an on-air contributor to Fox News, Hegseth was the public face of the group's mission, conducting a whistle-stop tour with his team from city to city, packaged by C.V.A. as the Defend Freedom Tour.

I spoke at length with two people who identified themselves as having contributed to the whistle-blower report. One of them said of Hegseth, "I've seen him drunk so many times. I've seen him dragged away not a few times but *multiple* times. To have him at the Pentagon would be scary," adding, "When those of us who worked at C.V.A. heard he was being considered for SecDef, it wasn't 'No,' it was 'Hell No!' " According to the complaint, at one such C.V.A. event in Virginia Beach, on Memorial Day weekend in 2014, Hegseth was "totally sloshed" and needed to be carried to his room because "he was so intoxicated." The following month, during an event in Cleveland, Hegseth, who had gone with his team to a bar around the corner from their hotel, was described as "completely drunk in a public place." According to the report, "several high profile people" who attended the organization's event "were very disappointed to see this kind of public behavior," though the report does not identify them.

In October, 2014, C.V.A. instituted a "no alcohol" policy at its events. But the next month, according to the report, Hegseth and another manager lifted the policy while overseeing a get-out-the-vote field operation to boost Republican candidates in North Carolina. According to the report, on the evening before the election, Hegseth, who had been out with three young female staff members, was so inebriated by 1 *a.m.* that a staffer who had driven him to his hotel, in a van full of other drunken staffers, asked for assistance to get Hegseth to his room. "Pete was completely passed out in the middle seat, slumped over" a young female staff member, the report says. It took two male staff members to get Hegseth into the hotel; after one young woman vomited in some bushes, another helped him into bed. In the morning, a team member had to wake Hegseth so that he didn't miss his flight. "All of this happened in public," according to the report, while C.V.A. was

“embedded” in the Republican get-out-the-vote effort. It went on, “Everyone who saw this was disgusted and in shock that the head of the team was that intoxicated.”

According to the report, a volunteer for the organization during this period was so concerned about the rampant promiscuity and sexism that she sent an e-mail to C.V.A.’s headquarters complaining about a lack of professionalism, an unhealthy workplace, and an atmosphere in which women were unfairly treated. According to the whistle-blower with whom I spoke, the volunteer received no response. *The New Yorker* was unable to reach the volunteer, but a source unconnected to C.V.A. confirmed that the volunteer had also spoken to him about having sent an e-mail to the group’s top management because she had been upset by Hegseth’s frequent drunkenness.

In late November, 2014, Hegseth and his team deployed to Louisiana for a U.S. Senate runoff. This is when, according to the whistle-blower complaint, Hegseth took the C.V.A. team to the strip club, where “he was so drunk he tried to get on the stage and dance with the strippers.” A female C.V.A. associate, the report says, “had to get him off of the stage,” adding, “She had to intervene with security to prevent him from getting thrown out.” The whistle-blower continued, as if in disbelief, “A Fox News contributor, with the rank of captain (at the time) in the National Guard, and the CEO of a veterans’ organization . . . was in a strip club trying to dance with strippers.”

Meanwhile, the female staffer who had to restrain Hegseth at the strip club alleged that a different male staff member had attempted to sexually assault her there, according to the report. A C.V.A. manager, however, was described as dismissive, for arguing that her attacker had been drunk and therefore shouldn’t be held responsible. According to the report, the female staffer took steps to file a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, and C.V.A. hired outside counsel. The female staffer declined to be interviewed. But, according to a source aware of the case, the matter was settled with a payment to the staffer, concealed by a nondisclosure agreement. As a result, the woman was “ostracized” and “experiencing reprisal” by the organization, which, the whistle-blower report said, “has become a hostile and intimidating working environment.” Another female staff member was also described as having been sexually harassed by a colleague, but was too intimidated to come forward “because she desperately needs her job.” The report declared, in bold print, “Fear of reprisal looms over every woman associated with the organization.”

In December, 2014, the group held an office Christmas party at the Grand Hyatt in Washington. Once again, according to the report, Hegseth was "noticeably intoxicated and had to be carried up to his room." The report stated, "His behavior was embarrassing in front of the team, but not surprising; people have simply come to expect Pete to get drunk at social events."

The 2015 federal tax filing by C.V.A. has an unusual note saying that "major programs developed in the last fiscal year were paused," and it describes Hegseth as "President (outgoing)." By the start of 2016, Hegseth, who had been paid a salary of $177,460, was out of his job.

A separate letter obtained by *The New Yorker*, which was e-mailed by a different staffer on November, 2015, to Pak, Hegseth's successor, expresses the upset that Hegseth's behavior caused. "The organization is owed the truth," the staffer wrote before he described two incidents that, he said, "change my perception of Mr. Pete Hegseth," especially "as the face of C.V.A." He went on to recount what took place in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. On May 29, 2015, the staffer said, Hegseth and someone travelling with the group's Defend Freedom Tour closed down the bar at the Sheraton Suites Hotel. The duo yelled "Kill All Muslims" multiple times, in what the staffer described as "a drunk and a violent manner." Hegseth's "despicable behavior," he wrote, "embarrassed the entire organization." He went on, "I personally was ashamed and . . . others were as well." The staffer's letter cited a second incident in which, he wrote, Hegseth "passed out" in the back of a party bus, then urinated in front of a hotel where C.V.A.'s team was staying. "I tell you this because it's the truth," the letter concluded. "And I sincerely care about the mission of C.VA and the future of my kids and the country."

Reached for comment, the author of the letter said, "If you print that, I will deny I wrote it." When he was reminded that it had been sent from the same personal e-mail account that he still uses, he said, "I don't care. I'll just say it never happened."

Hegseth has been open about resorting to alcohol during a period in his life when he had returned to the U.S. from active military duty and felt lost. In a 2022 interview with the *Reserve & National Guard Magazine*, he said that, after coming home, he felt isolated and unmoored.

Raised in Minnesota, Hegseth signed up for the Army R.O.T.C. in 2001 while attending Princeton, where he majored in politics and published the *Princeton Tory*, a pugnacious conservative journal that lambasted liberalism on campus. He published a commentary by another student mocking the view, expressed during

the school's orientation program, that sex with an unconscious partner constituted rape. As first reported online by the newsletter "Popular Information," run by Judd Legum, the commentary claimed that rape required both a failure to consent and "duress," which a passed-out woman couldn't experience.

After graduating, in 2003, Hegseth worked briefly on Wall Street, as an equity-markets analyst at Bear Stearns. In 2004, he was deployed for a year to Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, where he oversaw a platoon of soldiers from New Jersey guarding detainees. Soon after returning, and still with the National Guard, he volunteered to serve in Iraq, for which the Army awarded him the first of two Bronze Stars for meritorious service. Afterward, he moved to New York, a transition that he has acknowledged was "jarring." He told *Reserve & National Guard Magazine*, "I went from being in a combat zone to being in an apartment in Manhattan and without any contact other than phone calls here or an email here or there with the guys who I had served with." He said, "I didn't do much and I drank a lot trying to process what I had been through while dealing with a civilian world that frankly just didn't seem to care."

Advocating for veterans gave him a renewed sense of purpose, he said. In New York, he met a marine who was working for a small nonprofit organization called Vets for Freedom, which advocated for expanding the war in Iraq. In an interview, one early conservative sympathizer with the group described it to me as essentially an "AstroTurf" organization that had been devised by a handful of big-time political players to look like it was a grassroots veterans' movement. Hegseth once told a former associate that V.F.F.'s donors included three Republican billionaires who have since passed away: Bernard Marcus, the Home Depot magnate; Jerry Perenchio, the former head of Univision; and Harold Simmons, a Texas entrepreneur.

Hegseth appealed to the backers, the early sympathizer told me: he was a handsome, articulate Princeton graduate who had served honorably in the military, and, at the time, he believed ardently in the surge in America's war in Iraq. By 2007, Hegseth had become the organization's leader. "I had no idea what I was doing," he told the National Guard publication. "I didn't know if it would work."

In fact, under his leadership, V.F.F. soon ran up enormous debt, and financial records indicate that, by the end of 2008, it was unable to pay its creditors. The group's primary donors became concerned that their money was being wasted on inappropriate expenses; there were rumors of parties that "could politely be called

trysts," as the former associate of the group put it. The early sympathizer said, "I was not the first to hear that there was money sloshing around and sexually inappropriate behavior in the workplace."

In 2004, Hegseth had married his first of three wives, his high-school girlfriend from Minnesota, Meredith Schwarz. But he often lived apart from her while working in Washington, staying at a pool house owned by the parents of one of her college friends. In 2008, Schwarz filed for divorce after Hegseth admitted to multiple infidelities—his wife later learned that a journalist he'd introduced her to was among those with whom he was having an affair. The couple divorced in 2009.

Meanwhile, the finances of V.F.F. grew so dire that the group's donors hatched a plan to take control away from Hegseth. The donors' representatives hired a forensic accountant to review the books. The findings were appalling. In January, 2009, Hegseth sent a letter to the donors admitting that, as of that day, the group had less than a thousand dollars in the bank and $434,833 in unpaid bills. The group also had run up credit-card debts of as much as seventy-five thousand dollars. Hegseth said that he took full responsibility for the mess, but added that, unless the donors gave him more funds, V.F.F. would have to file for bankruptcy and close down.

One of the group's backers initially agreed to Hegseth's request. But, according to the early sympathizer, the donors decided, "Let's shut this thing down. Pete can get another job." The donors, who were strong supporters of America's military role in Iraq and Afghanistan, arranged for another veterans' group, Military Families United, which represented Gold Star families, to merge with V.F.F. and take over most of its management. "We tried to castrate him," Hegseth's former associate admitted. "It was a handoff." Annual federal tax filings for V.F.F. show the group's coffers draining and Hegseth's compensation dwindling. In 2010, the records show, Hegseth was identified as the group's "Executive Director/President" and was paid forty-five thousand dollars for thirty hours of work a week. The next year, he was identified as the group's "officer," and paid a salary of five thousand dollars for thirty minutes of work a week. In 2012, the tax filing again identified him as the group's "officer," and his compensation rose to eight thousand dollars, but the total grants received by the group that year totalled a mere eighty-one dollars.

Margaret Hoover, a Republican political commentator and political strategist who worked as an adviser to V.F.F. between 2008 and 2010, recently told CNN that she had grave concerns about Hegseth's ability to run the Pentagon, the largest department in the federal government, given his mismanagement at V.F.F. "I watched him run an organization very poorly, lose the confidence of donors. The organization ultimately folded and was forced to merge with another organization who individuals felt could run and manage funds on behalf of donors more responsibly than he could. That was my experience with him." Hoover stressed that V.F.F. was an exceedingly small organization, with fewer than ten employees, and a budget of between five million and ten million dollars. She told CNN, "And he couldn't do that properly—I don't know how he's going to run an organization with an eight-hundred-and-fifty-seven-billion-dollar budget and three million individuals."

By 2012, Hegseth had departed from what remained of V.F.F., and had launched an abortive bid for the Senate from Minnesota, where he was a captain in the state's National Guard. He then volunteered for another tour of active duty, this time in Afghanistan, to train Afghan security forces. Upon completing his tour of duty, he was promoted to the rank of major. In 2012, Hegseth formed a political-action committee, MN *PAC*, to help like-minded candidates, but, according to a report by American Public Media, a third of the funds in Hegseth's *PAC* was spent on parties for his family and friends, and less than half was spent on candidates.

In 2014, Hegseth joined Fox News, as a contributor. By then, he also was the C.E.O. of the Kochs' Concerned Veterans for America group. But by 2016 Hegseth had been forced to step aside from the organization. "There's a long pattern, over more than a decade, of malfeasance, financial mismanagement, and sexual impropriety," Hegseth's former associate told me. "There's a fair dose of bullying and misinformation, too."

It was as a celebrated veteran and weekend Fox News contributor that Hegseth appeared in October, 2017, as a dinner speaker at the California Federation of Republican Women's fortieth biennial convention, in Monterey, California. His personal life was in tumult. In 2010, he had married a second time, to Samantha Deering, a co-worker at Vets for Freedom. He admitted in an essay that year that he had fathered a child "out of wedlock" before marrying her, the *Times* reported. Then, in August, 2017, while still married to Deering, he fathered a daughter with another woman, a producer at Fox, Jennifer Rauchet, whom he eventually married, in 2019. As he and Deering wrangled their way through a difficult divorce, as the *Times* first reported, his mother, Penelope Hegseth, sent him an e-mail excoriating

him as "an abuser of women" who "belittles, lies, cheats, sleeps around, and uses women for his own power and ego." She admonished him, "Get some help and take an honest look at yourself." (A Trump spokesman denounced the newspaper's publication of the e-mail as "despicable" and noted that Hegseth's mother had apologized to him for writing it.)

A former colleague of Hegseth's at Fox recalled of him, "He had a kind of what-happens-in-Vegas-stays-in-Vegas kind of attitude, while his wife and kids were in Minnesota." The colleague added, "He was a huge drinker. I can't say if he had a problem, but he was very handsy with women, too. I've certainly seen him drunk."

Following his dinner speech at the convention, according to a report released by the Monterey Police Department, Hegseth and other attendees moved to an after-party, and then on to a sports bar in the hotel. There, the woman who would become Hegseth's alleged sexual-assault victim—a then thirty-year-old organizer working with the Republican Women's group—tried to intervene when she thought that Hegseth had become pushy toward a female attendee at the conference. He had allegedly touched the other woman's legs and tried to get her to come to his hotel room, the police report recounts. The female attendee told police investigators that she had sent distress signals to "Jane Doe"—as the alleged victim is called in the police report—in hopes of getting her to act as what she called a "crotch blocker." One onlooker told police that she thought both women had been flirting with Hegseth. But a friend of the woman who had signalled for Jane Doe's assistance confirmed her account, saying that her friend had told her that Hegseth's advances had been unwanted.

A bit later, around 1 *A.M.*, the hotel's video-surveillance footage captured Jane Doe escorting Hegseth away from the bar, walking arm in arm. Soon afterward, according to a hotel employee's statement to the police, the two engaged in a loud argument by the pool. The employee said that two separate guests had called to report the disturbance, and described Hegseth as "very intoxicated," saying that he cursed at the employee when he approached them. Hegseth argued that he had freedom of speech. The alleged victim, who told police that she had drunk more than usual that day, but who had appeared "not intoxicated" to the hotel employee, apologized for Hegseth's behavior to the employee, and told him that they were both Republicans. She then guided Hegseth toward his hotel room. Later, she told the police that they'd been arguing over what she regarded as Hegseth's inappropriate treatment of women.

What happened next is disputed. Text messages from the alleged victim to her husband—who had accompanied her to the conference and was staying at the hotel, along with their two young children—suggest that she was less than enamored of Hegseth. According to the police report, she texted that he was "giving off a 'creeper' vibe" and made fun of the ladies who, she said, were "freaking drooling over him." She lamented at one point, "I'm going to be here all night," adding, "It's awful." Her husband, meanwhile, asked if he should make s'mores with the kids or go ahead and "continue winding them down."

Hours later, the alleged victim's husband was still waiting for her return. Worried, he'd searched the sports bar, but it was empty. Around 2 *A.M.*, he texted her, saying, "Holy smokes lady . . . I don't remember the last time you were socializing at nearly 2:00 am." She responded oddly, typing, "Hahaha I know. I gotta make sure that fo"—dropping off mid-sentence. He responded, "Doing ok? My love? Worried about you."

A few hours before dawn, the alleged victim returned to the hotel room that she was sharing with her husband and kids. She told police later that she couldn't recall much of what had happened. But two days later she started to have frightening flashbacks and nightmares. She told police that she hazily recalled Hegseth taking her phone and blocking the door as she tried to leave. She recalled him on top of her, with his dog tags in her face. She recalled saying no a lot. Four days after the alleged assault, she went to a hospital and asked for a rape exam. She said that she thought someone might have slipped a drug into her drink and sexually assaulted her. She brought in the clothes she'd worn that night. According to the police report, she had developed an infection that could have resulted from a new sexual partner. She declined to name her alleged assailant. The nurse was legally required to report the incident to the police, who opened a criminal investigation. At that point, the alleged victim identified her assaulter as Hegseth.

Hegseth's account was quite different. He told police that he had not been intoxicated but just "buzzed." He had no memory of being belligerent or of being chastised about making noise by the pool, nor of having any sexual interest in his accuser. He said that he was confused when she stayed in his hotel room for what he said had "progressed" into a consensual sexual encounter.

The Monterey Country District Attorney's office brought no charges against Hegseth, explaining that "no charges were supported by proof beyond a reasonable doubt." The alleged victim and her husband threatened to file a

lawsuit, and in 2020 Hegseth secretly agreed to a financial settlement with them, in which he agreed to pay them an undisclosed sum. Both sides agreed to sign nondisclosure agreements concealing everything about the incident.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*, Trump's transition team was blindsided by the sexual-assault story because Hegseth had failed to disclose anything about it, including the fact that he had paid off his accuser. He also failed to disclose that he had received a copy of the police report in 2021, long before the Monterey police's recent release of it. The series of damning revelations has reportedly infuriated the transition team. "When we ask, 'Is there anything else we need to know about?' that is usually a good time to mention a police report," a Trump adviser told *Rolling Stone*. "Obviously he remembered that this all happened and there is no way—I don't think—he could have believed this wouldn't come out once he got nominated."

In 2016, Justin Higgins, a former Republican opposition researcher, vetted Hegseth for under-secretary roles in the first Trump Administration, on behalf of the Republican National Committee. In a commentary for MSNBC, Higgins wrote that, although he believes that Hegseth is "perhaps one of the least qualified picks for Secretary of Defense that we've seen," he thinks that Hegseth "was likely chosen because he seems willing to say and do anything Trump wants." It hadn't hurt, Higgins added, that Hegseth belittled some war crimes, and that "Trump thinks he looks and sounds good on TV." Hegseth has also been a strident opponent of gender equality in the military, proclaiming women unfit for combat, and calling the claim that diversity is a strength "garbage." In 2021, he was barred from participating in President Biden's Inauguration because a military officer was alarmed that Hegseth had tattoos of a Crusader's cross and the motto "Deus Vult"—insignias popular with far-right militants—and had alerted superiors that Hegseth might constitute an "insider threat."

On November 21st, Hegseth was cornered by reporters at the U.S. Capitol, as he called on senators whose votes he would need for his confirmation, accompanied by Vice-President-elect J. D. Vance. When Hegseth was asked about the sexual-assault allegation, he insisted that he had been exonerated of any wrongdoing. "The matter was fully investigated and I was completely cleared and that's where I am going to leave it," he told reporters.

In an interview, Tim Parlatore, Hegseth's lawyer, told me that his client was completely innocent, and that his accuser "was the aggressor" and had "tried to blackmail him." He also claimed that "sources," whom he declined to identify, told

him there was a shocking reason law-enforcement authorities hadn't charged Hegseth: their investigation had discovered that his accuser had previously brought a false rape charge against someone else, thus undermining her credibility. Parlatore made the same allegation in the New York *Post*, which quoted Hegseth demanding that Monterey County law-enforcement officials release their investigative records on the accuser.

The defense's claim that the accuser was a serial fabricator of sexual-assault charges is reminiscent of the bind that Anita Hill faced decades ago, during Justice Clarence Thomas's confirmation process. Hill accused Thomas of sexually harassing her when he had been her boss at the E.E.O.C. Thomas denied Hill's accusation, and his defenders attacked her credibility by spreading false rumors that she was an "erotomaniac" and a chronic liar. None of it was true. But it took time to disprove the falsehoods. Meanwhile, her credibility was damaged, and Thomas was confirmed.

A few days ago, I filed a public-records request with the Monterey County District Attorney's office, asking for any information supporting the claim made by Hegseth's lawyer that his accuser had levied sexual-assault claims against others. The answer came back promptly and definitively. The claim is spurious. The office had no such evidence. ♦

An earlier version of this article misstated Richard Blumenthal's position on the Senate Armed Services Committee.